



United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)

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Communications & Public Information Section

NEAR VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT

16 November 2017

Near Verbatim Transcript of
**Media Briefing by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations
and Head of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan**

Mr. David Shearer

Juba Conference Room

UNMISS Tamping Site – Juba - 16 November 2017

Opening Remarks:

Good morning and thanks for attending this press conference ... it's good to see you again.

I would like to update you on three key issues today; my meeting with President Kiir this week regarding the Paul Malong issue; the renewal of the UNMISS mandate and the Protection of Civilians sites that were established by the Mission.

I'd also like to comment briefly on a recent trip I took to Akobo.

[Meeting with President Kiir]

I met President Kiir on Tuesday afternoon, one of our regular meetings; where we discussed the successful resolution of the Paul Malong situation.

I'd like to take this opportunity to praise the role played by the Concerned Citizens' Committee for Peace, which acted as a mediator between Mr Malong and the Government.

Throughout these negotiations, UNMISS has been in contact with a broad range of people involved in the situation. I have been in constant contact with the acting chairperson of the committee, Dr Francis Deng – whose diplomatic abilities were instrumental in bringing about a peaceful conclusion to this issue.

This peaceful conclusion came down simply to the choice of putting South Sudan and stability in Juba before all other concerns. We are grateful for the statesman-like way in which the situation was resolved.

The President and I also touched on the importance of the presidential order he has just issued on humanitarian access. This, we hope, will better serve the interests of the 6.2 million South Sudanese who need relief aid of one sort or another by ensuring that humanitarian agencies are actually able to get to them. We will, as usual, continue to monitor progress.

In addition, we discussed what is known as the Strategic Review.

A review team is due to arrive from UN Headquarters in New York at the end of the month, to look at the situation in South Sudan and to consult with a wide range of people, including the government, the international and humanitarian communities as well as UNMISS.

This team will also spend two days in Addis Ababa, where it will meet with other South Sudanese groups including the opposition.

The Strategic Review team will report back to the UN Secretary-General who in turn reports to the Security Council.

Its findings will help inform the decision the Security Council will make on the renewal of the UNMISS mandate which brings me to my second point.

[Renewal of the UNMISS mandate]

The current UNMISS mandate expires on 15 December 2017. I'd like to reiterate that it's the 15-member Security Council based in New York, which decides whether or what the mandate will be and not us here in UNMISS.

As the Strategic Review will be coming out in the next couple of weeks, we are hopeful that the meetings that they have here and the findings that they have will be able to inform the Security Council as part of the mandate renewal.

I am personally committed to ensure there is a broad consultation process in which South Sudan is involved.

[Protection of Civilians sites]

I'd like to update you on the number of people living in our Protection of Civilians or POC sites. Currently, there are just under 213,000 people in six locations across the country.

The number has fluctuated depending on the security situation, but the trend now is showing a slow decline.

It's important to reiterate that these POCs exist to shelter South Sudanese people who believe they face the threat of physical violence and who genuinely fear for their lives.

It is also important to note that the government has the primary responsibility to protect its own people and the POCs, to remind everyone, were never intended as long-term solutions to the displacement crisis. Overwhelmingly, residents say they are keen to return home and restart their lives.

We are far from the conditions for safe return in many parts of South Sudan.

However, a number of joint initiatives are underway in Bentiu, Wau, Melut and Bor to create safe environments so families can return home if they choose to.

UNMISS works closely with humanitarian partners, community groups and the local authorities to ensure services are available outside the POCs so that people move outside the POCs and they still have services to go to. We will also support South Sudan security services to create a better environment.

We need to make the most of these opportunities to help return IDPs to their homes as long as it is voluntary, dignified and safe.

[Akobo]

Lastly, I'd like to briefly mention Akobo, where I travelled earlier this month.

I went to listen to the needs of the community, the local authorities and the 10 to 15 humanitarian agencies which are working there.

Around 71,000 displaced people are currently living in Akobo and the surrounding area.

It's clear that their needs are immense; UNMISS is now looking at ways of extending a presence in the town.

The UNMISS mandate is to protect civilians and support the delivery of humanitarian aid, so it was also important to hear from the humanitarian agencies there how the presence of peacekeepers and other mission personnel can help.

As you know, Akobo lies in an opposition-held part of South Sudan.

As UNMISS we need to reach communities in need in all parts of the country, regardless of their ethnic or political background.

We are looking currently at the ways in which we can better support those communities. As that comes to the fore, we can come back and brief you more thoroughly later on.

Thank you and I'm happy to take questions.

Q & As

Q: *With regards to Malong and Kiir negotiations, apparently Kiir had said Malong can go wherever he wants. Will the UN be facilitating that if he does leave to another country? Because there are US sanctions on him, how does that or doesn't that play into what the logistics look like.*

SRSR David Shearer: My understanding is that he is looking to leave the country – that's what I have been told – and that he is free to do that. There have been some issues around his travel documents which need to be sorted out but it is more a technocratic, bureaucratic issue and not any other issue. Once that happens, my understanding is that he is free to go. The UN will not be part of that; we haven't been asked. I think he will just leave as any other South Sudanese citizen would do on a normal flight. That's my understanding.

Our position all along right throughout this issue has been that we have fundamentally felt that it was an internal South Sudanese issue to be resolved inside the country. But we have offered support, as the UN, if it was felt that that would help bring about a peaceful resolution. Any involvement that we had and anything would have to have the acceptance of both sides.

Although UNMISS stayed in contact with many of the actors throughout the time, I was very pleased that it was resolved internally and in a way that allows Paul Malong to leave whenever he wants and as a normal citizen of South Sudan with a passport. I don't foresee us, the UN, being involved in the future.

Q: *You talked of the renewal of the mission in South Sudan, maybe in December. As the Head of the Mission in South Sudan, do you see that there is a need to renew the mandate in South Sudan and what is the main problem for that?*

The second question is that there is a letter that has been shown around written by Gen. Paul Malong to the Head of the Mission to South Sudan, David Shearer. Can you confirm receipt of that letter? What is your reaction to that letter?

SRSB Shearer: As I said before, the renewal of the Mission's mandate is very much up to the Security Council. Whether ...it does renew the mandate – I think almost certainly it will – and what form it would take, that would be up to the Security Council as well.

But clearly, what we would like to do through the Strategic Review, is to be able to canvas and understand some of the issues and opinions of people here so that we could feed into the decision that would ultimately be made by the Security Council. This is an opportunity to do that.

The Security Council also hears from a wide range of different actors on South Sudan including the South Sudanese Ambassador to the United Nations. The decision will be made towards the end of the year or the beginning of next year.

On the issue of the letter addressed to myself, it did not come in a hard copy to me but I saw it and we understood it to be genuine. As I said before, our approach to this is that if this issue could be resolved internally that was what we believed to be the best course of action. But we offered any support that we might be able to render but obviously that will have to be agreed to by both parties.

As I said, the Concerned Citizens' Committee for Peace chaired by Francis Deng, did an excellent job and it meant that the situation is being peaceably resolved without any violence, without any issues that might have negatively affected the international reputation of South Sudan.. The fact that we have, by all accounts, moved through that is very positive.

Q: *I want to take you back to the letter of Gen. Paul Malong. You know the issue brought a lot of tension in the whole of South Sudan and not Juba alone.*

You have said that he is free to go anywhere he wants to. Is it outside the country or he is free to travel within South Sudan?

Secondly, you met with President Kiir about the differences between him and Gen. Paul Malong. Was that because of the letter that he wrote that you met him or was that as part of your mandate?

SRSB Shearer: My understanding is that Paul Malong was looking to leave the country and that is what was negotiated by Francis Deng and the Concerned Citizens' Committee for Peace. As it stands right now, what I have been told is that in the near future, he will travel outside of South Sudan.

I do not know of any other restrictions on him.

The question that the **AP** mentioned about sanctions on him; there are sanctions on him with regards to the US. My understanding is they don't have any bearing on where he goes in particular around the region.

With regard to the letter, simply what I want to say is that our role here as part of the International Community, and according to the Security Council Resolution, is to help

build durable peace. We felt that if we could provide any support to do that in the context of what was going on, we would offer it. So my meeting with the President was very much to say, "Mr President we are here. If you need our support in some way, please get in contact with us. We sent that message back to Paul Malong as well through intermediaries. But we would prefer, and obviously feel it is more appropriate, if it was done internally within South Sudan, but we are here if our support is required".

It was very much that. It wasn't that we wanted to necessarily become involved. It was very much that we thought if we could do something, we would do so.

Q: There is this conflicting information about the killing of an aid worker in Torit, we understand that he works with Caritas. I wonder if you can shade more light on that.

The second question is about the security situation in Torit. We understand this week there are some pockets of insecurity in parts of Torit. What can you tell us about the whole security situation there?

SRSB Shearer: I cannot confirm exactly the situation in Torit. This was brought to my attention just yesterday so we are waiting for details. There was a situation where one of the staff member whose compound was invaded or there was a problem around the compound and he was shot. I would rather not talk about the details until I can be sure about it. Obviously if it is the death of an aid worker, that is a real tragedy but let's follow it up first.

With regards to Torit, there has been some persistent insecurity and particularly at night and I understand the incident happened at night. What we have said to the Governor there— and I will be going to Torit in the next couple of weeks - is that we can organize a joint patrol or patrol around the streets at night to help provide some security. We can never guarantee security but sometimes the presence of UNMISS troops and police in the town can help the situation. That is what we are looking at.

I have already had a meeting with the Governor the last time I was in Torit. He agreed to do that. We want to try and extend our support to local security efforts and also provide some more comfort to people.

Q: On the Strategic Review team that you talked about that is soon expected in South Sudan, how many people are coming and when exactly are they coming?

On the issue of the Regional Protection Force (RPF), you talked of the renewal of the mandate. Is the RPF component going to be part of it?

Coupled with the Gen. Malong issue, when do we expect the full deployment of the RPF to the country?

SRSB Shearer: On the Strategic Review team, it is coming at the end of the month. I cannot give you an exact date but it looks like the 28th or 29th of November. They will be here for about five or six days. Currently that is the plan. They will be in Juba but they will also travel outside the capital as well. We are quite keen for them to see at least two other locations, possibly one in the north and one in the south. I'll have to get back to you on the details as currently it's being planned.

The number coming out is likely to be around ten or twelve – that is typical. Some of them will be from within the UN and the person leading them is called Kevin Kennedy. Kevin Kennedy was in the UN, he held very senior positions in the UN but now he has been retired. He also has a military background before joining the UN.

On the RPF, there are about 750 troops in the country currently. We are waiting for the deployment of the remainder of the Rwandan battalion, which is about 800–900, and the Ethiopian battalion that's around about the same number. Their forward companies are already here – a company is about 120–150. There are two companies – the Ethiopian and Rwandan forward companies here and the remainder of the battalions will be coming between now and Christmas. That is the plan. Again, the dates are a little bit flexible at the moment but that's what we anticipate. We hope to be up and ready by around about that time.

The remainder of the forces are a little further back the track – the Kenyan battalion and some of the other issues.

Q: We have reports that the UN is planning to reopen its base in Yei. Can you confirm that?

We also hear that the UN base in Abyei has been extended for another six months. Can you confirm that as well?

SRSB Shearer: First, on Yei, that's correct. We are currently doing the engineering works for a permanent location in Yei. It will be in the same location where we formerly had a base.

We have good cooperation from the Governor down there and the local authorities, and there is a willingness for UNMISS to be involved there again. We have pretty much had a continuous presence down there. Sometimes there have been some gaps as patrols went down there and then changed; now with the engineering works going on, a company will be based there on a permanent basis – the same troops will be down there all the time.

On Abyei, I am not up to date on that at the moment. Until I am, I will refrain from answering that. I apologise but would rather have the facts in front of me.

Q: I would like to ask you on the number of people in Akobo. You said there are 71,000 – are they receiving services, are they in a POC or are they outside the POC,?

Secondly, you said that there are several people who are currently living in the POCs, in case the UNMISS mandate is not renewed, what will happen to them? What are your immediate plans for them?

SRSB Shearer: First of all on Akobo, the estimate is that there are 71,000 people who are displaced from other places and who have made it to Akobo. There is no POC and a lot of them are living with other communities or effectively by themselves. There are about a dozen humanitarian agencies that are providing services and, from my reading of what I have seen, are doing an excellent job. But they, also with the local authorities, are keen for UNMISS to have a presence there. What we are doing at the moment is seeing how we can have a presence. It takes quite a bit of logistical planning to build a

base; what we are looking at is some sort of presence in the interim so we will be able to provide support.

We are not looking at the mandate not being renewed at the moment. There is no plan that the mandate won't be renewed. So hopefully it will be renewed and we will be able to continue. If it doesn't, then we will start planning.

Q: Can the UN force protect Malong if he so wishes?

SRSB Shearer: That's a kind of an academic question because it hasn't happened and we haven't had to do it. Rather than talk about hypotheticals, what we can say is that the situation has been resolved peacefully and internally; we are very pleased that it has been. So let's leave it at that.

Q: The President has ordered authorities to allow for access to humanitarian agencies to do their work and we understand you met the President on that as well. Did you agree on any kind of mechanism to help in violations of this?

SRSB Shearer: From our point of view, the fact that President Kiir has issued a Presidential Order from the very top means that it carries some weight in terms of ensuring that humanitarian assistance moves properly. That is very welcome. The fact that it comes from the top means that we anticipate and we expect others right down the chain to follow that order from the security forces downwards.

Now access is a tricky issue. It is not just from the Government side but obviously, on the ground there are informal checkpoints, perhaps security forces that set up their own checkpoints to make money; there are opposition groups doing the same thing. It is not easy but what we welcome is that from the highest level of the Government there is that commitment to assist and support humanitarians to do their job.

The mechanism by which we do that will be the same. The mechanism, if it's allowed, will work perfectly well. It is people allowing that to happen which was the issue. With this order, we hope that willingness will increase and there will be an easier flow.

We have, as I said before, 6.2 million people who we are trying to reach. Particularly as we are coming into the dry season now, there is an opportunity to make sure that we have food and other supplies prepositioned. It is therefore particularly important to be able to move freely on the roads over the next few months.

I will speak in my next press conference around the planning of the roads. We are doing a lot of work on the roads to make sure they are open. This is not just for us actually, but also for the World Food Programme and other agencies and also because trade and business can get moving and the economy can get going. I will talk about that in detail when we've got our plans sorted out.

I would like to say as an aside, I think that as of today, the Korean engineering team has moved from Bor to Mangalla to begin fixing that particular road which is really bad. If we can get that done, then the Bor-Juba trade can continue. But, as I said, I will get a more detailed update in a couple of weeks' time.

Q: You talked about your next trip to Torit in the couple of weeks to come. Can you take journalists to accompany you on that trip?

SRSB Shearer: We have done this on a case-by-case basis. It depends on where we are going and what we are doing and that sort of thing but please take it up with Daniel and we will see what we can do.

As a general policy issue, we are interested in you being able to report what is happening across the country so if we can help you do your responsible job as a journalist, then we will try and facilitate that.

Q: This is a bit off-topic from what we've been talking about. Last night in Washington D.C. at the Holocaust Museum, there was a panel on preventing genocide in South Sudan. There were a few people on the panel but their criticism was that nothing was being done in country, criticising the UN as well as advocacy groups – that nothing is being done to count the dead. Since 2013, since 2016, that there is no mechanism in place.

I was wondering if you have a response to that and if the UN has something in the works in that regard.

SRSB Shearer: The difficulty in South Sudan, as you know, it is such a vast country. The logistics are so difficult and we cannot be in all place at all times.

While we obviously look with great concern and we follow up on areas where we know there have been deaths or atrocities carried out, the numbers we just simply cannot be accurate about. This often creates more problems than providing the numbers actually resolve. That is the reason we do not come up with specific numbers because we just cannot be absolutely sure about the quantity and scale of those numbers.

Our human rights teams are pushing out more and more into various areas. But getting into many of these areas is incredibly difficult, not just from the logistical point of view, but also because of the conflict.

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